The Irish Labour Party

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Introduction

The Labour Party are set to become the largest party in Ireland. With growing popularity in polls Labour already dominate many councils, especially in the cities, and are sure to win an unprecedented number of seats in any upcoming election. The end of Fianna Fail's historic hold over the working class represents a massive shift in popular conciousness. Fianna Fail's support in the working class was premised on nationalist rhetoric and the promise of economic advance. Now they are viewed as incompetent by the parasites of international finance. The end of 'civil war' politics and the shift away from green toryism are signs of huge changes in the landscape of Irish politics.But what is the nature of the Party that is benefiting from these changes?

On the Labour website they state that they are a party of "the four principles of socialism" and that these are "Freedom, Equality, Community and Democracy" but how has the Labour Party's interpretation of 'socialism' played out in practice? Just what is the nature of the Irish Labour Party and how should revolutionary socialists relate to that party? In the following I want to argue that the Labour Party was never a radical party nor was it ever a socialist organisation but, on the other hand, I want to also argue against those who would categorically define Labour as an outright 'capitalist' or right wing party in no way differentiated from Fianna Fail or Fine Gael. I want to outline the origins of Labour, and then to take some time to look at periods of struggle when Labour advanced, and to also examine the aftermath of Labour's periods in government.

The Birth of Irish Labour

As Michael Laffin describes, Irish Labour began life as- "a delicate neglected creature, vunerable, and totally lacking in self confidence". Irish 'reformism' was always weak because the poverty of the nation for a long time was a material barrier to the granting of reforms by Irish capitalism. The Irish Labour Party was a child of the unions. At a 1912 annual conference in Clonmel a declaration was passed 49 votes to 19 to form a Party to represent the interests of the Unions. Nothing was really done to give organisational form to this suggestion and a repeated declaration at the 1916 conference shows how little progress had actually been made in the intervening 4 years. The period of the Irish Labour Party's birth was a time of momentous worker's struggles and social transformation and yet the party managed to somehow escape unscathed and untouched by the radicalism surrounding the years of it's birth.

The Irish War of Independence and Civil War saw countless mass strikes, protests and the declaration of over a hundred 'Soviets' (although maybe not 'soviets' in the more encompassing sense of the Russian worker's councils – I think the desire to use that title for factory occupations and strike commitees indicates a sense of profound internationalism and class identification with the revolution in Russia). The War of Independence was much more than the much publicised struggles conducted by small bands of Republicans but involved railway workers refusing to ship military goods, the Belfast General Strike, a General strike in the South in support of hunger strikers, and that wonderful show of worker's power – the Limerick Soviet.

Labour type parties had first emerged in the late 1800s, although there were members of parliament in Britain who, much earlier, were friendly to the working class, such as Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor. There was an extension of the right to vote in the 1880's in Britain and the emergence of a permanently employed bureaucratic layer in the new Unions. These factors, coupled with a defeat of the various strikes of the 1890's, gave rise to a desire for representation in Parliament to amelorate the condition of workers. This suited the interests of the bureaucracies in the unions who saw the State and changes in legislation, and not working class activity, as the only path to change. Similar processes in various countries had led to the formation, in the same period, of Social Democratic parties.

Trotsky once explained that Irish workers had ideas that were shaped by, "an atmosphere saturated with heroic memories of national rebellion" and that this set of notions came into conflict with the, "egotistically narrow and imperially arrogant trade unionism of Britain", leaving the Irish working class wavering between "nationalism and syndicalism". Sydicalism- the idea that if the working class was fully unionised we could take over production- ignores the quesiton of the State. It's based on a mistaken parellel made between the emergence of capitalism under fuedalism and the emergence of socialism from capitalism. The capitalist class could build up wealth and influence under the aristocracy and eventually explode the aristocratic power structures. For the working class the situation is completely different- we either own a factory or office or we dont. Syndicalism seems fine when worker's struggles advance but when workers are forced to retreat, union membership drops and people begin to look around for a way forward. This can lead to a desire for parliamentary representation as a means to ameliorate working class conditions. This means there is a third element produced when syndicalist struggles reach an impasse- the desire for

parliamentary representation. This can coincide with the interests of the full time union officials who see negotiation within the framework of the present system and parliament as sacred. The defeat of the 1913 lockout left deep scars on the working class. At moments when the economic struggle seems blocked- the movement then seeks a political expression. Although we will return to the question of working class consciousness later.

A 'Socialist party of Ireland' was set up though in 1917 which most of the leading figures in Congress actually joined. (although they would later leave when, after various conflicts within the party, it was taken over by a more militant wing centred on Roddy Connolly, James Connolly's son, and affiliated to the Communist International or Comintern in 1921) The Trade Union Congress and Labour Party itself stood aside during the December 1918 elections because the workers of Ireland, as they claimed, "would willingly sacrifice.. their aspirations toward political power" to enhance the nation. Although it wasn't just standing aside for Sinn Fein and the failure to give worker's issues some form of parliamentary platform that led to the new party's weakness- the strike levels were massively increasing, from 58 strikes in 1914, at the outbreak of the 1st World War, up to over 200 strikes a year each year from 1918 to 1920. It was Labour's inability to give a lead to these all important extra parliamentary actions of the working class, to push forward those struggles, that truly represented the failure of Labour's 'socialism'.

In reality then the Irish Labour Party Trade Union Congress, apart from local elections in Dublin, didn't stand in an election until 1922. It is worth taking some time to look at the *achievements* of those from the union leadership, such as William O'Brien of the ITGWU and Thomas Johnson, who would later become leading figures in the Irish Labour Party (Johnson later becoming a Party leader). To look at their inability to give struggles a lead, but at pivotal moments, how they were actively holding back mass struggles.

After the 1916 Rising, with increased repression from the British authorities and economic hardship caused by lowering wartime living standards, Ireland moved towards war with Britain. The War of Independence is usually treated as a history of the actions of the small bands of IRA volunteers but it's important to note that key turning points were driven by mass worker's actions. In his memoirs, 'Annals of an Active Life', Nevil Macready, who was the Commander in Chief of the British forces in Ireland from March 1920, noted how strike actions had a hugely detrimental effect on their operations. In 1919 in Belfast 40,000 workers both Catholic and Protestant were on strike for over 4 weeks . The economic depression which hit in 1921 demoralised workers and created the soil from which grew the expulsion of Catholics from the shipyards but it was the absolutely unforgivable betrayals of the Union Officials and Labour's inability to forge solidarity for actions in Belfast amongst Dublin workers and vice versa that really broke the unity that had been briefly won through struggle. Dublin union officials made no comment when troops from Dublin were moved against the strikers in Belfast.

In April 1919 10,000 workers marched in Limerick after the shooting of IRA man, Robert Byrne. He had been shot on the 6th of April while escaping from Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) custody. The British declared a special military area and placed the imposition of passes on workers. On the 13th of April the Trades Council, representing 35 unions, met and a mass strike was called. Restaurants and Hotels were picketed and over 14,000 workers joined the action. 300 reinforcements

were requested by the authorities but Brigadier General J. Byrne of the RIC stated that this was impossible as there were "so many strikes going on elsewhere". The 'soviet' had bakers resume work to feed the city, farmers were compelled to pay 'soviet' prices and in remarkable move- the workers of limerick issued there own money. But they were about to be betrayed.

On the 16th of April 1919 when Limerick rail workers were set to join the strike, and potentially spread solidarity actions across the country, William O'Brien sent a telegram stating," defer stoppage pending national action" which gave the impression that a national stoppage in support was about to be called. O'Brien held 3 days of talks with Sinn Fein and the IRA and eventually came to the conclusion, that instead of resistance, the entire working population of the city should be evacuated! After delaying as long as was possible the union leaders, except O'Brien (more than likely to avoid association with the sell out), made it down to Limerick. Tom Johnson's speech to the workers Limerick hit all the right notes before getting to the substance of the leadership's position- that workers who didn't need permits should return to work. The posters announcing the return to work were torn from walls by bitter workers. The momentum was broken and on 27th of April 1919 there was a full return to work.This wasn't a one off betrayal of the working class by the leaders of Labour- time and time again working class mass action would emerge only to be limited and sold out by the narrow vision of the trade union bureaucracy and their political expression - the Labour party.

General Macready was well used to putting down worker's struggles (he had threatened to shoot miners in Wales in 1910) and the atmosphere of repression was increased. General Crozier of the RIC stated that they,"murder, rob, loot and burn up the innocent". After the Limerick Soviet, and in this atmosphere of repression, worker's struggle across Ireland continued to escalate with massive May Day marches taking place throughout Ireland. On the same day right across Europe workers marched with the impetus of the Russian Revolution and news of worker's councils arriving from Germany. It felt as if worker's power was on the rise from the Atlantic to the outer reaches of the former Russian Empire and that the old order was teetering near collapse.

Outside of the urban centres there were massive dramatic battles between farm hands and the reactionary employer's 'Farmer's Union'. There was the so-called "Battle of Fenor" in Co. Waterford where up to 300 workers fought 120 police, the occupation of Cleeve's Creamery- where workers ran the enterprise for 9 days, the Irish Automobile Driver's Union Strike – which the transport unions failed to support. When steam engineers and others unofficially joined the strike The Irish Labour Party Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC) called a special aggregate meeting to bring the strike to an end. Mass revolt was in the air.

30 prisoners on 5th April 1920, who were in Mountjoy prison without charge, went on hunger strike. They were joined by the next day by 30 more and by the end of the week there were 91 people on hunder strike and a crowd of 40,000 supporters outside the prison. The ILPTUC were forced to take action and called a General Strike which began with rail workers and soon spread right across the country with strike commitees taking the running of most towns.

Factory Occupations and Strikes continued througout the War of Independence and into the Civil War showing the massive

potential for a completely different direction to the one Ireland took under the Cumman Na Gaedhael government and then under Fianna Fail.
Labour's failures during this period cannot be blamed purely on the objective circumstances. With only 4% of the workforce engaged in manufacturing in the South in the 1920s some might say Ireland's backwardness was a material barrier to the creation of a radical force- but this is a mechanical approach for even a cursory glance at the mass struggles of the period show the potential that lay squandered for the want of resolute leadership.

Man creates his own history although not in circumstances of his own choosing - so although we fight in circumstances inherited from the past – the limits have to be tested by action and Ireland's struggles took place in the context of a general Europe wide revolt. Things could have been so different if there was an organisation created by the militants in each struggle- that could push forward and unite the most radical workers in each fight. An organisation that could have resisted the call to limit each fight to negotiations to resolve that 'particular' issue with no overall view of the importance of the formation of a consciousness of it's own stregnth within the working class. It's a realisation that ultimately our class can only really find social and economic liberation with the working class seizure of power. Surely the unity forged in such a struggle across class lines could have undercut the appeals from the Orange bosses in the North and could have broken the hold of cross class Catholic nationalism in the South.

For Labour and the union bureaucrats the solution of a particular struggle, despite the detrimental effects of their compromises on worker's self confidence, is all important. For revolutionaries the end goal is related to the concrete day to day struggles. It is this focus on worker's self emancipation, and the knowledge that an awareness of working class power amongst the workers is all important, that prevents the genuine revolutionary socialists from accepting rotten compromises that belittle the role of the working class in it's own consciousness.

Reform or Revolution?

The Labour Party's failure to take a stance on the Irish National Question didn't stem from the personal failing of the individual leaders involved but from the very nature of Social Democratic parties. Social Democratic parties the world over suffer the same glorification of the institutions of the State. They see the State as above history, as a 'neutral' force that can be as easily utilised by one class as by another. The marxist approach is to examine the growth of the State with the emergence of class societies, to look at it's development and ultimately, it's end.

The original basis of Labour was the trade unions and even to this day, despite the influx of some middle class careerists, there is still a cross over between the union bureaucracy and Irish Labour. For example, Jack O'Connor -of the 200,000 worker strong SIPTU- is on the Labour Party's executive commitee. Labour's largest source of income is member's donations, with €232,474 handed over in 2007, but Union affiliation fees still came to €60,107 the same year. For trade union officials the State is outside of class interests and therefore capable of balancing between the capitalist class and the working class.This is because of the fact of their material elevation above the majority of their members and also because of the role they play in constant negotiation. The unions role is

to negotiate better conditions under wage slavery- not to end wage slavery.

Most class conscious workers on a picket line don't toss a coin everytime the police draw batons to see which side they come down on- the bosses or the workers.They know full well that the court injunctions are designed to break their resolve and destroy their picket on behalf of the boss.Although most workers do feel that a 'good' government could solve their problems through parliamentary means. Parliament and the State can seem like unassailable insitutions. But what exactly is the State?

The State is "a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms" consisting of "special bodies of armed men" with the purpose of maintaining the privelege of the Ruling Class and holding down the majority who work. The illusory democracy that we live under is the "best possible political shell" for capitalism as no change of personel in parliament touches the foundations of the tyranny that is the economic rule of the capitalists over the workers. The State consists of courts, prisons and has a monopoly on violence. This is as true as the first State as it will be true of the last. We spend about ten minutes in our whole lifetimes in a voting booth. That pathetic stunted democracy, which amounts to nothing more than choosing which members of the elite will rule over us for another four years, is obviously incapable of shaking the economic dominance of the capitalist class. The decision making processes that really matter take place in unaccountable board rooms of the major corporations. The largest corporations have economic outputs comparable to countries and yet they are perfect hierarchies- the dictators of the board, the officers of management and the foot soldiers whose labour provides for all the others.

The State is a weapon for the maintenance of the economic rule of a minority class over the exploited majority. Any substantial change in the condition of workers will come up against the full weight and machinery of that State - as we have seen many times over in the 20th Century and will no doubt see again in the 21st.

In the course of every mass struggle of the working class we produce own forms of democratic organ in order to conduct the struggle successfully. It begins with the necessity of a strike committee and, if the struggle is on a large enough scale, becomes a worker's council. In Russia in 1905 and again in 1917 workers formed mass organs of popular power called 'soviets'. There are more recent examples though with the 'cordones' of Chile in 1973 and the 'shora' in Iran during the revolution of 1979. A situation of 'dual power' emerges were the structures of the two diametrically opposing classes sit side by side. The old repressive machinery of the capitalist state and the newly formed worker's bodies.

Once the stage of dual power is reached the situation can only be resolved by the victory of one class or the other. Once challenged it's entirely obvious that the ruling class will attempt to utterly destroy all vestiges of alternate power. At such critical moments Labour style parties end up serving the interests of the ruling class by preaching the legitimacy of the old institutions. By coming to power in a crisis these parties quickly try to 'restore order'- meaning the power of the repressive institutions of the bourgeois state- thus demoralising the working class and preparing the ground for a later period of revenge from the ruling class when they re gather their strength. The most clear example of this was the SPD in Germany in the 1918 to 1923 period when it was they who, in

the name of restoring the sanctity of 'law and order', oversaw the murder of revolutionaries like Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebnicht. The tragedy was though that the revolutionaries had too little influence and had won over far too small a section of the class. We will return later to the issue of winning over the supporters of Labour type parties.

The Civil War and Labour

Recession hit Ireland in 1920 which added mass unemployment to the levers available to the bosses, north and south, in their attempts to hold down and prevent protests and strike actions from escalating. In Belfast the recession took hold in 1921. With the defeat of the enormous general strike nearly 2 years before - the ground had been fertilised for the growth of sectarianism which was actively encouraged by Unionist employers. The Northern Ireland Labour Party accomodated to orangeism while Labour in the south was accomodating to Sinn Fein and nationalism with utterly tragic consequences. Catholic workers were expelled from workplaces as wages fell.

General Macready signed the truce between Britain and Ireland on the 11th of July 1921. On the 14th of April 1922 Rory O'Connor and Liam Mellows of the Dublin Brigade of the IRA seized the Four Courts in Dublin. The country began the slide into Civil War. Sinn Fein split in two. On one side of the conflict was the new 'Free State', a "conservative regime rooted in traditional catholic values and wedded to...the large farmers, professional classes and businessmen", with the newspapers and bishops shouting from the sidelines. Against them stood the anti-treatyites- the farmer's sons, shopkeepers and intellectuals. The small Communist Party of Ireland stood with the Anti-Treaty forces. It had been formed by Roddy Connolly (James's son) in 1921 but was miniscule with only a handful of members at it's founding conference.

Labour's response to the Civil War was to organise a 'strike against militarism' on the 24th of April in an attempt to convince both sides to back away from armed confrontation. Abour longed for stability. Roddy Connolly declared this day of action as "more of a lockout" than a strike as it recieved the enthusiastic backing of the employers. Labour branches were told not to discuss or pass resolutions on the Treaty. Labour's desire was the establishment of a stable state and british style parliament, within which they could form an opposition. This false view, of the State as neutral, brought Labour to the point were they were giving the reactionary Free State government legitimacy. Labour failed to relate to republican activists who were separated from trade unionism because Labour remained wed to a reformist strategy - the sanctity of law and order and the State.

Groups outside of the Labour Party such as the Irish Citizens Army, which still had over 200 members, handed over their ammunition and disolved themselves into the IRA. Roddy Connolly served under Oscar Traynor in the Dublin IRA. The Civil War lasted 10 months with the entire establishment throwing their weight behind the Free State forces. Once the Civil War reached it's conclusion, as D.R.O'Connor Lysaght explains, the "bourgeoisie and bureacrat united with the blessing of the hierarchy to attack Republicans and anti-capitalist agitators". There were 77 Republicans killed in reprisal shootings by the government, on Dec 7th 1922 when two pro-treaty deputies were shot 4 republican prisoners were taken out and shot without trial in revenge. The government used pensioners, ex employees and the army to break a post

office strike even though the workers expressed their willingness to accept 12.5% pay cut and arrested the chairs of strike commitees in Galway and Dundalk, jailing them without charge. The Trade Union Congress was bombarded with requests for solidarity actions which they ignored. Labour was more interested in the convening of the Dail, which had been delayed, than challenging the conservative basis upon which the new Irish state was being born. They had got 17 of the 18 candidates elected in the June Polls, and with the Republicans boycotting the institution, there were 92 deputies in total giving W.T.Cosgrave's government a majority with 58.

Jim Larkin returned to Ireland from the USA after a 10 year absense in April 1923 just as the tide was turning back in terms of worker's confidence. He had missed the peak- the years of mass strikes and struggle during the War of Independence. He pasioinately attacked the Labour Party and union leaders for their "limitation of vision" and on June the 10th occupied the Transport Union's headquarters in Liberty Hall with around 100 supporters. At the Labour conference in august there were scuffles between the various factions. Labour's vote fell dramatically in the august elections and they found themselves without a single representative in Dublin or Cork. Labour was opposition to the Cumann Na Gaedhael government which happily ignored it while the party was seen to do nothing for the rash of strikes that followed the end of the Civil War. The London Times referred to the Labour Party, in terms any radical would find insulting, as " a very constitutional party". Labour could always be trusted to play it safe.

The Blueshirts- Ireland's Fascists

Labour's weakness thoughout the 20s culminated in a devastatingly low vote at the Sept 1927 elections which led to a further turn away from the worker's movement in the pursuit of wider support. William Norton put down a motion calling for the seperation of the political and industrial sides of the movement at Special Conference on 28th Feb 1930. Labour's new direction was criticised by some in the party as full of "pale pink, bourgeois objects anybody could subscribe to" but the party was intent on appealing to the professional classes and even the manufacturers.

So Labour entered the 1930s in a weak position and was incapable of standing against the tide of 'red scare' rhetoric and anticommunist hysteria generated by the Cumman Na Gaedhael government who were painting all and sundry as a threat to stability. The Irish elite were impatient to end the state of flux and instability that had been part and parcel of the War years.

Fianna Fail was founded from a split in antitreaty Sinn Fein. The new party was led by Eamonn DeValera. Although portrayed as sinister 'communistic' gunmen by the government they grew from strength to strength and won 44.5% of the entire vote in 1932. At the same time of Labour's 33 candidates- half lost their deposits. Fianna Fail were seen by most to be more radical than the Labour party. At the first meeting of the sixth Dail Fianna Fail deputies carried revolvers for fear of opposition to their coming to power. Fianna Fail once in power soon, despite the smell of gunsmoke, came into conflict with the worker's movement. In November of 1933 they attempted to cut Public Service pay.

The 1930s saw a polarisation towards the left and right with a growth in radical left wing 'Revolutionary Worker's Groups' and also a growth in right wing 'Catholic Action Groups' and the fascist Blueshirts. The Fianna Fail government set out to create an indigenous industrial base with tariffs and a move away from the free trade policies of Cumann Na Gaedhael. The new government's policies antagonised the big farmers. Fianna Fail set out to create a populist movement tying together new indutrialists and workers with the promise of economic advance. There were state enterprises formed and any problems were brushed aside by pointing to Britain as the cause of all Ireland's ills. With unemployment rising from 30,000 in March of 33 to 80,000 by October DeValera was quick to blame the British. The Control Manufactures Acts of 1932 and 1934 meant that Foreign Capital could not own more than a 50% share in Irish enterprises. Fianna Fail developed a close relationship with the Trade Unions through the formation of Joint Industrial Councils.

From 1931 to 34 cattle exports fell dramatically and with strikes and worker's activity reviving Cumann Na Gaedhael moved massively to the right. The 'Blueshirts' emerged at this time and were Ireland's very own imitation of the Fascist movements of Mussolini and Hitler. Eoin O'Duffy had been police commissioner from 1922 until his dismissal by DeValera in 1933. They had their marches banned by Fianna Fail. The Labour Party leaders, predictably, agreed with Fianna Fail that the antifascists, who were regularly breaking up Blueshirt meetings, were "thugs and rioters". As a result of the ban the Blueshirts made a turn towards forming a political party by merging with Cumman NaGaedhael and the Centre Party (an organisation of weathy farmers) to form the United Ireland Party or Fine Gael. It wouldn't be too long before the Labour Party would drop it's uncritical support for Fianna Fail's economic policies and end up in coalition with Fine Gael- a party of the Anglo-Irish elite, big farmers, clericalists and ex-fascists.

Labour and Fine Gael

Labour's relationship with Fine Gael has always been one of the keys to understanding the weakness of the Irish Labour Party. Every coalition situation has led to a growth in support for the larger party and the demoralisation of Labour activists and supporters.The Sunday Press described the situation for the smaller party in coalition quite well when they stated how support for them had "vanished, leaving Fine Gael fattened by a blood transfusion fatal to the donor". The general pattern has been one of increasing support for Labour leading to declarations of intent to fight elections alone and on a working class platform and then complete collapse after capitulating to and failing to challenge the right wing Fine Gael agenda in government. Usually then this was followed once more by a period of regret on behalf of Labour, a period of doubt and soul searching leading to increasingly left rhetoric and talk of anticoalitionism.

Labour's support had increased in the 1940s with the Second World War increasing economic hardship. In 1941 Fianna Fail introduced a Trade Union Act which was a threat to the right to strike and an attempt to combat the growing militancy from the working class in response to a growing gap between prices and wages. 10,000 marched against the Trade Union Bill and the Wages Standstill Order. Many working class supporters of Fianna Fail broke to join the Labour Party and they became the biggest party in Dublin in the local elections of 1941. By the

time the 1943 General Election came around Labour were back up to 17 seats.

When Jim Larkin decided to join the Labour Party it was too much to stomach for more conservative elements in the party and 5 Labour TDs associated with the Transport Union split off to form a 'National Labour Party'. The split was premised on the closeness of many of the Union leaders to Fianna Fail's policies and willingness to oust 'British' unions, while at the same time the ITGWU spoke of Labour as being 'infected' by communism. Special Branch and the 'Catholic Standard' paper conspired to aid the 'red scare' with a series of unusually detailed exposures of communist activists. Labour capitulated completely and wouldn't stand up to these accusations - going as far as establishing a commision of inquiry and expelling 6 of it's members. But the level of militancy in the working class continued to rise and rise.

In 1947 the Irish Times spoke of a society drifting, in their minds, towards anarchy. That year had seen strikes by ESB workers, road workers, strikes on the buses and in Irish Life. In 1948 this mass opposition to Fianna Fail led to five parties, including Labour, National Labour and Fine Gael forming the 1st Inter Party Government.

Each party was allocated ministers according to their parliamentary presence. Fine Gael's first act though was to veto the presence of Jim Larkin in the government. William Norton and TJ Murphy got Social Welfare and Local Government for Labour. Norton was also made deputy prime minister, a role which he took very seriously, according to some, to the point were he did what was good for the government and not what was good for workers or even the Labour Party. National Labour got Post and Telegraphs and Clann na Poblachta's Noel Browne got Health.

On the 4th of November 1949 Browne tried to introduce a revised Health Bill which included the provision of free health care to mothers and children. Fianna fail's attempt to put through a similar bill in october 1947 had met with 500 suggested amendments from Fine Gael and the predictable condemnation of the Church. By June 1950 a draft Mother and Child scheme was sent around the Cabinet and to the Irish Medical Association. On the 10th of October the Bishops wrote to the Taoiseach expressing their vehement opposition to the proposals. The Church was the State's main provider of health provision and resented what they saw as an intrusion into their territory where they could, amongst other things, regulate the dissemination of material on birth control to women.

Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin notched up the anticommunist rhetoric with the Catholic Neswpapers setting the tone with statements such as- "the welfare state is diluted socialism and socialism is disguised communism". When Fine Gael's John A.Costello told the Cabinet that "this must be the end of the mother and child scheme" as he read out a letter from the church hierarchy Norton's disgraceful response was that Labour would "not go flouting the authority of the Bishops". Roddy Connolly threatened to quit Labour if Browne left office but he never acted. After Browne and others withdrew their support for the Goverment, and with a revolt by independent farming deputies over the price of milk, Costello called a general election.

Labour spent the next few years combatting severe apathy in it's own ranks. Labour's Tom Johnson blamed the "human material available" although it seems that even when there is

far better human material available in terms of worker's solidarity and strikes Labour was incapable of breaking from their acceptance of the market and the party's fatalism. When Dublin Branches of the Party passed anti-coalition motions the leader's response was to declare that they should have fewer Dublin branches.

In order to survive Labour had no choice but to make a turn towards protest. The opportunity came when Fianna Fail introduced April 1952's 'Famine Budget'. Thousands gathered at the GPO to protest days after but by the March 1954 Election Labour were set for entry into another coalition. No movement was ever as important as getting their hands on the reins of state in however a limited manner.

When 350 delegates met in Dublin to discuss the 12 point plan for government the leadership took absolutely no chances that their return to power would be stopped by any kind of principled opposition. The entire DunLoaghaire branch, for example, was informed at the door that their branch had been 'suspended' and lo and behold the programme was adopted unanimously with Dublin branches abstaining.

The 2nd Inter Party Government had Jim Larkin asking "has Labour a policy?" and with rising costs of living the leadership told members not to expect "too much too soon". The economy stagnated, unemployment rapidly rose and the Unions became dissatisfied. Labours coalition partners, Fine Gael, were intent on forging links with the CIA in their battle against international communism- as Costello stated communism was a "creed to which we are implacably opposed". When the government fell Labour was reduced to just one seat in Dublin and at their June 1957 conference once more decided that they would enter no more coalition governments. But by the beginning of the 1970s they would be in league with Fine Gael once more.

By 1970 Irish Labour were determined to break out of the promise of non coalitionism made to the more radical of their rank and file members. At a special meeting in Cork Anti Coalitionists staged a walkout crying 'treachery' after the leadership won by 396 votes to 204. The accustions of rigging that came from some on the left seemed justified after one pro coalitionist declared, "that was a nice speech you made there, boy, but that was a nice 2 busloads of delegates I brought up from Kerry too". The approach to Liam Cosgrave of Fine Gael was made on 13th June 1972 and, after fighting the Election on a joint manifesto, by 1973 Labour were where they wanted to be - back in Government. Labour got 5 cabinet posts with Corish getting the role of Tanaiste.

The world economy came crashing down in 1973 with profit rates falling after an unprecendented period of expansion and growth. The post war boom was at an end and worker's standard of living was falling rapidly with inflation doubling from 1973 to 1977. The Irish economy was seen to be "falling over a cliff". Instead of challenging capitalism in crisis Labour once more oversaw the complete dissillusionment of it's supporters as unemployment rose to 106,000 by 1977. The government failed to introduce even limited contraception in a vote in 1974. When a much publicised Wealth Tax was introduced it had anything of substance removed by Fine Gael. As a result of overseeing the devastation of jobs and worker's conditions Labour completely collapsed - their vote declined from 13.7% to 11.6% in 1977 down to 9.9% in 1981. In Dublin they went from 28.3% of the vote in 1968 down to 17.5% in 1977 and down further to just 10.5% in late 1982. Branch meetings lost countless members.

In 1977 Fianna Fail returned with their highest vote since 1938 with 50.6% of the vote. The Labour party's time in government had pushed people towards giving Fianna Fail one the largest surges of support ever recorded. Brendan Corish announced his resignation and was replaced by Frank Cluskey, a union official with the Workers Union of Ireland. Labour attempted to atone for it's grotesque behaviour in office by talking about nationalisation of the banks, removal of clerical influence from schools and that the Party's ultimate aim was the 'creation of a classless society'. They went through a period of left wing rhetoric. The irony is that by the utilisation of reformist methods, i.e. negotiation, compromise, the parliamentary road, that 'classless society' moves further and further out of reach. The working class upon which such a society is premised are further and further demoralised by the actions of the Labour leaders on high. The emancipation of the working class is to be achieved by deals with Fine Gael, utilising the structures of the capitalist state.

In 1979 Labour had once again denounced coalition and yet by 1981 was once more in office under the leadership of Michael O Leary. This government fell after the attempted introduction of a savage budget with embargos on Public Sector recruitment and a regressive increase in VAT from 10% to 15%. It was an attempt to put VAT on children's clothing which gave Fianna Fai's Charles Haughey, of all people, the opportunity to denounce the government's adherence to 'monetarism'. Labour was in this situation only 2 years after a mass movement against PAYE tax reform which produced a strike in Dublin in March 1979 and a protest 50,000 strong. Labour had failed to engage in any substantial way to promote this movement. The union leaders opposed taking action but pressure from the rank and file was strong enough to force their hands. 150,000 took to the streets of Dublin and 40,000 in Cork.

The Labour Party's disdain for this movement was shown when Barry Desmond stated that he "will never support as long as i am in public life the idea, concept or practice of a political one day strike. I believe in the ballot box". But all the ballot box had brought workers was Dick Spring in office giving tax breaks to the oil companies and using the Gardai against ESB strikers in Cork. So this is what the reformists meant by 'realism'? The pattern of rising worker's struggles leading to dissatisfaction with Fianna Fail, growing support for Labour, and then a coalition government that attacks workers with Fine Gael emerging stronger and Labour weak was the direct outgrowth of Labour's view that parliament is the only source of power. When parliament is in sight a strong workers movement stops being an electoral support and becomes a threat to the incoming coalition.

Labour and the Church

As we've seen Labour was never a party that would go "flouting the authority of the Bishops". Four of the Inter Party government ministers were 'Knights of Columbanus'- including Labour's William Norton. Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical 'Rerum Novarum', on the condition of workers, had set out that one could not be a good catholic and a socialist. In 1949 Pope Pius XII wrote that excommunication was automatic for any catholic who became a communist. The Catholic Church in Ireland had always laid the boot into workers and left wingers whenever struggle dipped and it was that "very constitutional party", Labour, who would bend over

backwards to demonstrate their adherence to these 'christian' doctrines.

In the early 1930s clerical anti-communist hysteria reached it's peak in Ireland with socialist infiltration of the 'flock' the subject matter of many a pastoral and sermon. Catholic action groups were set up all over the country and vigilantes burned down a worker's hall in Leitrim. Meetings of the unemployed were regularly broken up. On 26th of march 1933 church attendees laid seige to Connolly house, headquarters of the Revolutionary Workers Groups (RWG), and set fire to the factory next door before moving on to the Worker's College in Eccle's St. The RWGs fell apart in rural areas because of bitter condemnation from the pulpits. Labour's William Norton declared that none of this was of any concern to his party and T.J Murphy announced that Labour should be for the deportation of "two or three foreign communists".

Labour took the same aloof stance during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 with the party trying to establish that they had no connection whatsoever with the Communist Party and issuing statements of opposition to both Franco's fascism and the Communism of the Republican side. At the party's February 1937 conference they felt it necessary to put forward a motion condemning Labour TDs for speaking on pro-Franco Irish Christian Front platforms because some already had. In fact during debates following the collapse of the First Inter Party Government, in response to charges of 'communism' hurled against Labour, one Labour TD exclaimed- "I was in charge of 250 men to go out and fight with General Franco in Spain." He was shut up by embarrassed party colleagues. Labour could always be gauranteed to tow the Church hierarchy's line. From Norton to Brendan Corish, who always took care to "read his encyclicals", the party would never challange the prevailing ideology but was bound to, capitulate to, and reflect it.

Labour type parties are sure to regurgitate ruling ideology. The ruling ideas in any society are the ideas of those who own the media and the schools. This means that most of the time a substantial number of workers will accept these ideas as common sense. A sense of powerlessness can increase the hold of these ruling ideas. When workers enter into common struggle they begin to question the prevailing ideas. It is this breaking from the ruling ideas that lays the foundations for genuine socialism. But if your opinion is that the only true power in society lies in parliament then you only see worker's movements as a springboard. The betrayals and compromises of Labour in power belittles the workers in their own minds. Once workers feel weak ruling ideas- pessimism, individualism, cynicism, sexism, racism- seem common sense. It's no accident that the far right can benifit by cuts and austerity implemented by Labour governments in Britain and Europe.

The 1960s –Labour's Left Turn

It's worth taking some time to look at the 1960's, a period of massive economic and political shifts in Ireland. To look at Labour's increasingly radical policies which emerged during that period and how, despite the highest level of worker's strike activity since the war of independence, they ultimately threw it all away again.

In 1958 Irish capitalism made a decisive turn towards multinational Capital in order to end the impasse that the economy found itself in during the 1950's. The 1950's were

miserable years for the majority of people living in Ireland with over 400,000 emigrating. Of persons aged 10 to 19 years in 1950 over two fifths had departed by 1961. Those in employment dropping by almost a quarter between 1946 and 1953. For those still in employment real wages fell. Patrick Kavanagh described living in the repressive atmosphere of Ireland in the 50's as "like living at a wake" and with book censorship continuing Fianna Fail were intent not to "disturb the mourners with a thought". Native capitalism was too weak to solve it's problems.

The publication of T.K Whitaker's document on 'economic development' in 1958 marked a decicive turn towards opening up the economy and relaxing tariffs, which were lowered by 10% in 1963 and 64. The ruling class realised they needed the support of international capital. Fianna Fail returned to power in the Election of March 1957 with a record 78 seats inheriting a adverse trade balance of £73.6million. Whitaker's advice that "reliance on a a shrinking home market offers no prospect of satisfying Ireland's employment aspirations" was enshrined in Fianna Fail policy. The ITGWU praised Fianna Fail for their imagination.

Until 1957 38% of the workforce still worked on the land. In 1950 livestock represented 37.5% of our exports, with other foods – 72% of exports, but had declined to 50% combined by 1968. 56% of workers were in Unions at the start of the 60s and by 1971 women represented 27.3% of the workforce. Between 1963 and 1973 the growth rate of manufacturing in the South of Ireland was matched by only 4 other countries in the world. Fianna fail's Sean Lemass could speak of the "rising tide lifting all boats" with growth in National production reaching 7.9% in 1968. This changing economic situation gave rise to an inversion of the emigration situation (by the 1970s there was a net inflow of people of on average 0.4% per year.) Employment grew giving workers more and more confindence to challenge for wage increases. This confidence was spurred on by economic transformation but also, later in the decade, by the massive political crisis that broke out in the North of Ireland. Demands arose for reform in many areas such as women's rights to protests over the Vietnam War.

Union Congress leader Charles McCarthy stated that "the decade ended with many people fearing we were on the brink of revolution." With the crisis in the North reverberating in the South and one million workdays lost to strike actions in 1970 (the highest figure since 1937) the Labour Party experienced massive growth.

In 1962 Busmen took strike action against the introduction of one man buses. When 6 workers were dismissed on May 2nd an emergnency meeting was called 2,000 strong and, ignoring the Union's demand that 7 days notice be given to the Company, the workers took immediate action. The very next day there was a total unofficial shut down of all Dublin Bus services and the day following that the workers marched to the offices of the ITGWU only to be greeted by disdain from Fintan Kennedy and other officials. He wouldn't speak to the workers "whom he saw as a mob". The strike was only ended by the mediation of 2 Dublin priests. After the dispute ended the union disgracefully took disciplinary action against some key workers involved. 1,700 Busmen left the ITGWU to join the ATGWU.

Despite the cowardice of the various union leaders strike followed strike as the decade prgressed- in October 1965 Irish Telephonists Association picketed exchanges with Fianna Fail leader Sean Lemass using Offences agains the State Act to

arrest 3 workers. Dockers and the National Busworkers Union pledged support and the attorney general was forced to release the workers! Newspapers were also crippled by strikes in 1965 as were building sites the year before. The 'Dayworkers Association' was a rank and file grouping of ESB workers who took strike action in early 1967. Workers were put in prison by the state but with Union Congress stating that they "feared a general movement of workers springing from this, a general revolt...as was experienced in France.." ESB management quickly payed the fines themselves. The idea of a general revolt, along the lines of May 1968 in Paris, terrified the union bureaucracy and the Labour Party.

The Labour Party experienced huge growth with 9,100 members in 1966 building towards 15,300 in 1969. The Party was now led by Brendan Corish - a devout Catholic who, like his father, accepted "without qualification in all respects the teaching of the Hierarchy and the Church". In 1958 when a protestant woman in Fethard on Sea left with her children for Northern Ireland Corish was happy to stoke the fires of bigotry. When the local Catholics began to boycott Protestant goods he spoke of those who conspire to "kidnap Catholic children".

Labour mid sixties began to speak of itself as 'socialist' and in 1967 joined the Socialist International. At their 1966 conference there were 590 delegates and Corish recieved a standing ovation for his vague talk of the 'various degrees of socialism'. In the summer of 1967 the ITGWU affiliated to the Party after 20 years. The general explosion in workers's and political activism had Sinn Fein standing in 1967 on a 'socialist platform'. This new political mood was reflected in the number of motions at Labour's Oct 1967 conference that mentioned the Vietnam War. Corish declared that the 'seventies will be socialist'and Labour laid out that it's policies now included a 15 year plan for economic development, land nationalisations and heavier Capital taxation. With the economy growing, and worker's confidence rising, Labour began to make more and more promises.

In the Election of 1969 Fianna Fail's Sean McEntee spoke of Labour being for Stalin and the "red flames of burning homesteads in Meath". Fianna Fail's populists appealed to anti-intellectualism talking of the "political queers from Trinity College" who made up the Labour Party. Conor Cruise O'Brien from Labour responded by attacking the fact that Fianna Fail's director of elections, Charles Haughey, had just made a large sum of cash through land speculation. In the Election Labour made massive gains in Dublin with 29.5% of the vote. This didn't match the leaderships inflated expectations and they saw this as a defeat. Immediately Labour began thinking about moving back towards coalition only a few months after Corish had ruled out any move towards Fine Gael saying they "are a private enterprise party, we are socialists". Not since 1922 had Labour recieved anything as high as the 17% they got nationally yet the fact that they had stood as many as 99 candidates meant that 52 lost deposits. It was commonly stated that far from the seventies being socialist but that the 'socialists would be seventy' by the time Labour came to power.

In 1969 Labour sent a delegation consisting of figures such as Noel Browne and Conor Cruise O Brien to Derry and Armagh to investigate for themselves the confrontation between Civil Rights groups and the RUC and B specials. As the Labour government in Britain sent in the army- Labour in Ireland began to speak of the need to 'normalise' the situation. Brendan Corish spoke of how the British Army "instead of being an occupation force, could be turned into a peacekeeping

force" and Labour seemed more concerned with opposing the rise of radicalism and extremism than with challenging the Sectarian structures of the State. We can see another radical period in the history of the Irish working class, leading to a massive growth in Labour, was completely squandered and, as we noted in the section on Fine Gael, led to further coalitions with the Right.

There Is No Alternative

Dick Spring, Labour leader at the time of the collapse of the 'Socialist' Eastern Bloc, went on the attack against the Left in the party adopting a new constitution that dropped the 'aspirations' to Public Ownership of industry. This shift closer to the market was not only premised on the fall of what was called 'socialism' but has to be seen in terms of the historic defeats inflicted on the working class internationally in the 1980s.

With the massive defeats inflicted on organised labour, most notably by Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US the stage was set for a turn to a more thourough going acceptance of the rule of market forces – because in their eyes Thatcher's statement was fulfilled and 'there was no alternative'. In 1989 the radicals grouped around the 'militant' tendency were expelled. Mary Robinson, who had been expelled from Labour, ran for president in 1990. She was the first winning candidate ever proposed by Labour.

As unemployment reached 300,000 Spring took Labour into coalition with the green tories of Fianna Fail. After the 1992 Election Labour, sickeningly, were part of a government which, in the middle of a crisis, gave the rich a Bertie Ahern negotiated Tax Amnesty. In 1997 Spring was replaced by Ruari Quinn who entered talks with 'Democratic Left' a breakaway from the Workers Party. This gave Labour some of their recent leading members including Pat Rabbite and Eamonn Gilmore. Spring resigned in 1997 an Ruari Quinn became leader. He lasted until 2002 when he resigned because of poor election results. Quinn was replace by Patt Rabbitte. In 2005 Labour formed a new deal with right wing Fine Gael. After winning 20 seats in the 2007 elections Eamonn Gilmore was unanimously elected party leader.

Ireland's Celtic Tiger boom collapsed. Labour managed to gain 14.7% of the vote at 2009's Local Elections with 132 seats, many of which were in Dublin. Working class people moving away from voting Fianna Fail will look to Labour to tackle the crisis in the economy. Labour's commitment to Fine Gael is as strong than ever despite the massive shifts in the polls. It's not inevitable that once people realise that Labour are no real opposition that those people will move on to the genuine left, sometimes demoralised and angry people can also move to the right. Although it seems certain that Fianna Fail though have lost their historic hold over the working class.

Eamonn Gilmore speaking at the SIPTU biennial conference in Tralee in 2009 warned that a Labour governent would be at odds with the Trade Union movement. He claimed it was necessary to reduce the Public Sector pay bill. The connection between Labour and the unions is still in place - although Gilmore has ordered a 'root and branch' review of the relationship. Trade Unions affiliated to the Party can still nominate delegates to vote at conferences and the Unions affiliated still include some of the larger such as SIPTU, Amicus and UCATT. Although the parliamentary party has

massive autonomy and can ignore radical motions even when they are passed.

Labour in government are willing to cut pay and attack workers- but weren't they always? And isn't their acceptance that the rules of engagement necessarily involve an acceptance of the market quite in line with the views and the vacillations of the top Union Bureaucrats? In fact Jack O'Connor, head of SIPTU, accepts that workers should shoulder the burden of this collapsed economy. O'Connor, as we have remarked, is part of the executive of the Labour Party. The Croke Park deal sees the union leaders accept the loss of 17,000 public sector jobs. Reformism needs a healthy capitalism in order to function. During the booming 60s Labour moved to the left in the context of the economy and also under the pressure of growing worker's struggles. In the present economic situation the reformists can offer reformism without reforms. Their inability to challange the system will see them forced to attack workers. They are incapable of seeing an alternative.

What kind of Party?

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas", because the class that "has the means of material production at it's disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental reproduction". Marx is here describing the basic fact that the class that rules over the factories and offices will be the same class that will rule the 'means of mental reproduction' i.e. the newspapers, TV stations etc. If Marx is correct then it follows that most of the time working class people will interpret the world through filters provided by the ruling class and accept these as common sense. The more powerless workers feel, and the further away from struggle they are, the stronger the hold of these ruling class ideas.

A key argument flows from this - for if this is that case then it must also be true that mass organisations of the working class, such as trade unions and even the most radical of social-democratic parties, will reflect ruling class ideas. It's not the case though that the working class are just empty vessels waiting for direction from an omnipotent ruling class media - worker's consciousness is also conditioned by the fact that Capitalism constantly forces, through political and economic crisis, the workers into collective action.

Capitalism is built upon private appropriation of *social* labour - but in the normal run of things workers who feel powerless and alienated don't trust in their own collective strength. During struggle a section of workers will come towards socialist forms of understanding, a middle group will vaccilate between the ideas born from action and the old ideas, and another section scabs and passed the pickets. So the class struggle between the Capitalists and the working class is refected in a battle between workers and workers.

Worker's are torn between ideas conditioned by their collective struggles and, especially in periods of defeat, acceptance of ruling ideas. Reformism is an expression of this contradictory consciousness. It's easy to see that organisations that unite the *entire* class will reflect the ideas of the ruling class. As long as the majority of workers are still under the influence of these alien notions that mass party will seem to be very practical when implementing policies based on 'common sense'. Yet that 'common sense' is nothing but complete capitulation before the ideas of the capitalist class. This fits into the Labour Party's ultimate pessimism as to the potential of the working

class for self emancipation and self transformation through struggle.

So why do workers accept Labour and it's agenda? The formation of working class conciousness under capitalism - both ideas conditioned by alienation, and hence potentially the ruling class, and ideas born from collective action- renders the working class open to even the most diluted brands of reformism in certain circumstances.

There are those who see the revolutionary or '*vangaurd'* party as an inherently elitist formation. The basic idea is that one section of the class would organise to give a lead to other sections. Lenin's concepton of a fighting party elicits screams of denounciation from the Anarchist movement and the advocates of Labour. This is to fundamentally fail to understand the basis and strength of Lenin's concept of the party.

If the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class then those who believe in spontaneity are correct and all we have to do is wait for that glorious day when the working class awakes to it's historic mission and liberates us one and all. That this is absolute nonsense as is obvious. Not only from our discussion of the nature of working class consiousness under Capitalism, but because any worker who has spent time on a strike will inform you very simply that it's workers who break pickets - the scab is part of the working class. There are also forces such as the union leaders and the Labour party who try to chloroform the movement and induce pessimism.

The union leadership succeed in pushing through rotten deals because a section of the workers accepts their arguments and lack the confidence to challenge them. Leninism is based on a profound understanding of the actual nature of working class life. For Lenin the working class was more than the stunted creature conditioned by ruling ideas that breaks pickets or is drawn towards racist notions. There is a justification for organising the *forward* thinking section of the class because we *think* more of the class we *expect* more from the class. Unlike the reformists we dont take human nature as given- human nature is societally conditioned and as such is capable of massive transformation from historical period to historical period.

To render the forward thinking section of the class more effective we need to organise that section. A complete socialist understanding cannot come through the experience of one struggle alone. A worker may be sharp on the arguments around High Court injunctions and rank and file groups but terrible when it comes to women's rights. We need to constantly fight, even within the party, against the influence of ruling ideas. But who teaches the teachers? The relationship between the forward section of the class, organised in a revolutionary party, and the rest has to be a constant dialogue. This is why the party has to be absolutely democratic with freedom of discussion through regular party meetings. But once a decision has been made we move as one to implement those democratic decisions. This is what Lenin called 'democratic centralism'. We have freedom of discussion and unity in action.

The United Front

But that can't be the end of the matter as the revolutionaries must engage with the rest of the working class, must understand that people enter into struggle with one set of ideas and emerge with another. If the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class then we must understand that workers with reformist ideas who may follow the Labour Party are in a learning process. The experience of a Labour government will be a valuable lesson for the Irish working class- that is – as long as the radical left can pull dissillusioned workers further to the left at each and every betrayal by Labour. Revolutionaries must be capable of creating united fronts where revolutionary and reformist workers can take common action. We need to win the support base of Labour. It is because we understand that Labour is a contradictory party- a party with a capitalist leadership who have roots in the unions and the wider working class- that we understand how vital it is to engage with those roots.

This means putting Labour councillors on platforms in order to expose their weaknesses. There are those who will say 'why give them a platform if the leadership are capitalist and demoralise the working class movement?'. The answer is in the question. It is precisely *because* Labour have mass support that it would be *criminal* of the revolutionaries to leave the working class in thier hands. By placing a Labour spokesperson on a platform we force them to either support the particular march or campaign (which will bring more workers onto the streets and increase workers confidence) or wriggle their way out (which will reveal their nature in front of those gathered). The costs of not winning over masses of workers from Labour are too high. We need their supporters to hear our proposals alongside the Labour leaders. It's through our activism and superior solutions we can build a genuine worker's party.

To the left of Labour though we also need new radical left alliances. Groupings that allow a space for workers breaking from Labour towards the radical left who may not quite regard themselves as revolutionaries. The formation of such alliances themselves will help to erode Labour's base and may help to cause splits and arguments within Labout itself. The elections offer the opportunity to start the building of such alliances. The People Before Profit Alliance was one such attempt.

The Labour Party is incapable of serving the interests of the working class and does not, as we have seen, have a previous history of struggle from which they have retreated. They have never stood in the traditions of James Connolly. If the Labour Party become the expression of opposition to the present crisis then their *inevitable* sell outs will demoralise workers who have given them their support. This could lead to the rise of a new right. But if the radical left can come together and the revolutionary movement can grow we can pull workers towards more radical solutions. Labour is still a 'capitalist workers party', a party full of ruling class ideas but with support from and roots in the unions and working class. The race is on the build a genuine radical alliance to the left of Labour and as an alternative to the Labour Party and within that to build a revolutionary organisation whose focus is *always* with the self emancipation of the working class.

The Labour Party are set to become the largest party in Ireland. With growing popularity in polls Labour already dominate many councils, especially in the cities, and are sure to win an unprecedented number of seats in any upcoming election. The end of Fianna Fail's historic hold over the working class represents a massive shift in popular conciousness. The end of 'civil war' politics and the shift away from green toryism are signs of huge changes in the landscape of Irish politics. But what is the nature of the Labour Party that is benefiting from these changes?

On the Labour website they state that they are a party of "the four principles of socialism" and that these are "Freedom, Equality, Community and Democracy" but how has the Labour Party's interpretation of 'socialism' played out in practice? Just what is the nature of the Irish Labour Party and how should revolutionary socialists relate to that party?

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